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ABSTRACT

Are new labels for stigmatized groups of students merely new packaging for old meanings? Is this linguistic illusion of change an aspect of education as an institution and of educators as a speech community? To address these questions, this paper examines labels popularized in the 1960s--"culturally deprived/disadvantaged," and "at-risk," a label of the 1980s that some have argued is synonymous with the earlier terms. This paper synthesizes work in sociolinguistics, history, and policy analysis to develop a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon of the repeated replacement of student labels that mark highly charged cultural boundaries such as race and class. Findings are presented from a study that examined the uses of "culturally deprived/disadvantaged" and "at risk" over time in educational journals and books, supplemented by a review of historical interpretations of the 1960s and 1980s. The data lend support to a theoretical framework for understanding cases of lexical replacement in the domain of terms for stigmatized groups of students. However, one label does not simply replace the previous one. Rather, the new label reflects something new about the political context, the current ways of interpreting differences and mediating cultural boundaries. Labels delineate "us/them" boundaries that are perceived by "us," who are culturally undeprived and not-at-risk, as fundamental and threatening differences. Three figures are included. (Contains 105 references.) (LMI)

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The cycle of student labels in education: The case of culturally deprived/disadvantaged and at risk

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INTRODUCTION

> This description of at-risk students and their families should be familiar. After all, it is almost 200 years old (Cuban, 1989, p. 780).

Historian Larry Cuban argues that educators repeat the same mistakes in the treatment of students from poor families who are unsuccessful in school, because they do not recognize that a flawed analysis may continue to reappear under new guises.

Are new labels for stigmatized groups of students merely new packaging for old meanings? Is this linguistic illusion of change an aspect of education as an institution and educators as a speech community? To address these questions, I will examine labels popularized in the 1960s, culturally deprived/ disadvantaged, and at-risk, a label of the 1980s that some have argued is synonymous with the earlier terms. The terms culturally deprived/disadvantaged have nearly disappeared from educators' public vocabularies; after considerable criticism, they are considered racist and "politically incorrect." Some authors have argued that at-risk is merely a replacement for these older terms, and should be discarded on the same grounds.

This paper synthesizes work in sociolinguistics, history and policy analysis to develop a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon of the repeated replacement of student labels that mark highly charged cultural boundaries such as race and class. I will present findings from a study of the uses of culturally deprived/disadvantaged and at risk over time in educational journals and books, as well as a review of historical interpretations of the 1960s and 1980s periods, to support the framework. Descriptions of the research design and methodology for the study are included in the appendix.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A caveat: The framework presented here suggests a series of stages or a cyclical process in the domain of terms for traditionally stigmatized groups. The "cycle" model, however, is a heuristic that over-simplifies or reifies a very complex process in which more than one "stage" may occur at the same time. For example, some groups may be promoting a label at the same time that others are critiquing it.

The appearance of a new student label

The ERIC Thesaurus lists dozens of student descriptors, from academically gifted to white (Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors, 1987), but the ERIC lexicon is restricted. If one includes student descriptors used by educational practitioners, the domain grows much larger, more colorful and more complex. In the 1970s

a team headed by Jere Brophy asked 27 elementary teachers to describe each of their students with 3 adjectives. A total of 362 children were described twice, by two different teachers in successive years. The appendix of a report from the study lists 544 descriptors teachers supplied (Brophy et al., 1976), most of which will never enter the ERIC lexicon. With so many ways of describing students, who needs another label?

Semantic domains are never static (Lehrer, 1983). For example, although the ERIC lexicon is restricted and relatively stable, terms are added and discarded with each new edition of the Thesaurus. The most logical reason for adding a new term to the domain would be that a new kind of student has appeared who is not adequately described by any existing label (Bartsch, 1987). Much more likely, the category already existed but only recently became a focus of concern. For example, in the 1980s a movement proposed a previously unrecognized problem domain, which they labeled missing children (Best, 1990). In 1990 ERIC added this term, an indication of the movement's political success.

"Dead" or "invalid" descriptors and their replacements listed in each ERIC Thesaurus present another possibility. In the case of lexical replacement, a descriptor has come to be considered inappropriate, and has been discarded in favor of a new one (Bartsch, 1987). For example, in the not-so-distant past, psychologists considered the terms imbecile and idiot to be acceptable, objective ways of describing persons whose IQ scores fell within certain ranges, even though in common usage these terms constituted grave insults. Political pressure by advocacy groups forced their replacement (in public discourse, at any rate) by terms with more neutral connotations.

Long before the current "PC" controversy, Bolinger and Sears (1981) argued that in a competitive, highly politicized society speakers attempt to strip their public language of negative connotations. If a term's connotations become too negative, it will be replaced. The objective is to maintain a denatured, euphemistic discourse devoid of reference to politics, emotion or prejudice. Edelman (1977) maintains that policymakers in particular prefer scientific-sounding, anonymous labels that mask biases toward targeted groups. "Buzzwords" for social problems (e.g., underclass) may mask racism, promote victim-blaming and over-simplify complex issues (Wright, 1992).

However, replacement of labels for stigmatized groups is not a solution to the root problem of stigmatization. For example, Schulz (1975) asserts that terms for women may originate in neutral semantic territory, but over time acquire negative connotations because their referents, women, are negatively valued. The "disabled" have experienced many label-changes (e.g., ERIC replaced handicapped with disability in 1980), but each label becomes pejorative because the group remains

stigmatized (Bolinger, 1980). (Jokesters have recently satirized this trend by coining mock euphemisms such as vertically challenged.) Lexical replacement in domains of terms for stigmatized groups, then, is a cyclical process, what Bolinger calls a "domino theory of euphemisms" (p. 74). E.g., consider the current proposal to adopt the less objectifying person with a disability in lieu of the noun disabled (Conant, 1986; Hadley & Brodwin, 1988).

A label may also be replaced because it has become difficult to capture the public's interest with the old one. Many social problems compete for political attention and limited funding in U.S. society, and a new descriptor can be a device to create new interest in an old issue (Best, 1990). Changes in the political climate also bring changes in labels for social problems (Schon, 1979). Policymakers construct "stories" about social problems that drastically reduce their complexity. Embedded in these stories are evocative terms or "generative metaphors" that suggest preferred policy solutions, making them appear obvious or natural. Schon's example is that labeling older urban neighborhoods blight in the 1950s defined them as diseased organisms requiring a drastic cure. The generative metaphor was an analogy between housing policy and public health. In the liberal 1960s, urban neighborhoods became communities, and the solution was to strengthen them through social organizing. Similarly, Edelman claims that "how the problem is named involves alternative scenarios, each with its own facts, value judgments and emotions" (1977, p. 29). Moreover, in choosing a label for a target group, experts and policymakers define other roles in relation to that group; e.g., labeling poor families dysfunctional entails an expanded role for mental health and social work professionals.

In education, Aspin (1984) points out that reform movements are replete with new metaphors that are politically useful because they are ambiguous enough to mean something to everyone (e.g., Greene's 1984 deconstruction of "excellence"). At first, they may be associated with a surge in innovative thinking and action, but eventually they grow worn. If they are incorporated into formal policy, their meanings must be standardized, weakening their evocative and creative power. The next wave of innovation requires a new set of metaphors. Taylor (1984) warns that educational policy metaphors can be "seductively reductionistic" (p. 11), and that metaphors borrowed from other disciplines may "invite unhelpful comparisons with processes that have little to do with education." (p. 15). For example, Guay (1987) is critical of "technological" metaphors borrowed from business that promote an "instrumental way of thinking" toward students (p. 29).

Finally, lexical replacement may result from a group's own demand for self-definition, as evidenced in ERIC's change from

Negro to Black in 1977. Historically, terms that dominant groups use to describe subordinate groups have been systematically biased in ways that "dehumanize their referents, representing them as an undifferentiated and faceless collectivity involved in mechanical and inevitable processes" (Sykes 1985, p. 95). When groups seize the power to label themselves, they seek to change this disempowering image. Ethnic labels have effects on identity-formation, social interation with insiders and outsiders, group solidarity and pride, institutionalized oppression, and distribution of targeted resources (Asamoah et al., 1991).

Again, this process of self-definition is not static, but continuous. A few years after ERIC replaced Negro with Black, Hogan (1983) objected to Black because of its negative connotations and descriptive inaccuracy, proposing a change to Brown; and Fairchild (1985) strongly advocated African American, because it denoted a clear and positive cultural identity. The domain of self-determined labels for so-called "minority" groups (this term too is contested) is an area of very active debate (Asamoah et al., 1991; Hurtado & Arce, 1987).

All of these explanations for lexical replacement make inferences about the effects or accomplishments of language. Whorf's (1941) classic hypothesis is that the label given to a situation matters, because it conditions ways of thinking and behaving in that situation. Labeling theorists, adopting a Whorfian framework, have attempted to show that labels have more or less determining effects on behavior toward labeled persons (Best & Luckenbill, 1982; Rosenhan, 1975; Scheff, 1975). The assumption is that changing labels for groups of people makes a difference, whether it serves to mask negative attitudes or relationships, to justify a new kind of special treatment, to arouse awareness and change public perceptions, or to change a group's self-presentation.

These explanations also refer to the motivations of particular groups of speakers -- reformers, experts, policymakers, advocates, group members -- for adopting new terminology. The assumption is that changing labels is an intentional process embedded in a cultural and political context.

Agents of linguistic change

The power to create new labels is equally distributed and dependent only on a speaker's imagination. "Street" language, the language of the young and relatively powerless, is often cited as a wellspring of linguistic innovation. But only some innovations are adopted by members of "mainstream" society, becoming transformed from linguistic deviations into norms (Bartsch, 1987). Lehrer's (1983) semantic studies suggest fundamental differences between experts and nonexperts in the

uses and definitions of descriptors. Nonexperts use terms in much less precise and restricted ways than experts (cf. Mehan et al.'s, 1986, "lay" vs. "professional" distinction).

It is evident from the Brophy studies (Anderson et al. 1975; Brophy et al. 1976) that teachers continually create new ways of describing students, few of which will ever enter the ERIC Thesaurus or the jargon of educational researchers. Teachers posed 25 ways of describing what the researchers called simply "self-motivated" students. Several teachers described students as "bullies." The researchers placed this term in the category of "aggressiveness," a legitimate psychological descriptor (Brophy et al., 1976). The researchers listed 3 pages of terms they were unable to place in any standard psychological category; for example: puzzling, biggest pack rat around, redneck, wide-eyed, and improved ring-tailed tooter. Only the researchers' categories appeared when the study was published as Student Characteristics and Teaching (Brophy and Evertson, 1981). Experts strive to limit the number of terms in the official vocabulary of a field and to specify their definitions to allow for precise classification (Lehrer, 1983). This is a marker of the scientification and professionalization of a field -- and a loss of power for those closer to "lay" status, such as teachers (Mehan et al., 1986).

However, lexical replacement in the ERIC lexicon shows that at times experts yield to political pressure from nonexperts. Social reformers often act as linguistic change agents. Reformers adopt labels that present a particular image of the group or problem they champion, to influence social attitudes. They also adopt labels that they believe will sell in what Best (1990) calls the "social problems marketplace," labels that will contribute to both the rhetorical and emotional strength of their arguments. Reformers choose labels for social problems that have media appeal; the media further diffuses the label, along with the reform argument. For example, the movement to rescue "missing children" in the 1980s adopted this label as part of an argument that thousands of children had unaccountably vanished from their homes, and governments must act to rescue them. The label captured media attention that led to public support for new federal and state legislation (Best, 1990).

Why does a new label diffuse to a wider group of speakers? At the level of the individual, Hudson (1980) theorized that choosing a linguistic item over its alternatives locates a speaker in "multidimensional social space." Adopting a new term conveys a message about how the speaker would prefer to be perceived by others in the community. The speaker's purpose may be to emulate a particular model group with whom s/he identifies (Trudgill, 1983). In education, national leaders, prestigious groups or well-known experts promote the use of new terms, and others acquire prestige by adopting them, locating themselves on

the "cutting edge." Analysis of the discourse of educational administrators (Fraatz, 1988; Gronn, 1983) suggests that they use everyday talk to re-establish the legitimacy of their authority. Adopting the latest buzzword may be part of a strategy of impression management administrators employ to achieve the identity of educational "leaders" (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984).

In education, there are also material incentives to adopt a new term. In the "publish or perish" academic culture, papers titled with the latest terminology seem more likely to be accepted for publication and conference presentations. Calls for grant proposals indicate which labels are attracting new funding. In the competition for scarce resources for research and program development, there are great incentives for adopting the latest student label, and thereby further promoting its use.

Many discourse analysts, however, have moved away from equating linguistic norms with the sum of a series of individual, self-interested choices. Adoption of a new term is also part of a larger political or cultural pattern.

> To understand the language-power relationship attention should be focused not on the intention of the individual user but rather on the inheritance of practices and conceptions that precede what comes out of the speakers' mouth (Shapiro, 1984, p. 6).

The adoption of a new label may express ideological solidarity or conflict, a reflection of one group's biases (positive or negative) toward another group (Sykes, 1985; Kress, 1985). It may be a manifestation of broader social change. Therefore, to understand the appearance of a new label for a "subordinate" group, one must examine the historical context.

Making it official: Adopting a "buzzword" into policy discourse

Most policy analysts once portrayed policymaking as rational activity (Schon, 1979). According to these accounts, policymakers objectively labeled and defined a problem, posed a solution uniquely suited to that problem, and then assigned responsibility for implementing the solution (McHoul, 1986). Dreeben and Barr describe this traditional mode of policy analysis as a "view from the top" (1983, p. 90). This perspective was "very generally adopted by those in our society who, by profession and position, are most powerfully involved in the analysis, design, implementation and criticism of social policy" (Schon, 1979, p. 261). Policy analysis of this ilk bolstered an image of policymakers as knowledgeable, competent and responsive to the public interest. On the other hand, those charged with implementing policy (in education, teachers) were often portrayed as part of the problem -- irrational, unsophisticated, or resistant, or too close to the ground to

perceive the macro-level processes that supposedly guide policy decisions (Lampert, 1985). And the "targets" of policy, the people with "problems"? Their views were rarely considered.

On the other hand, critical policy analysts (Edelman, 1977; McHoul, 1986; Schon, 1979) argue that rather than rationally responding to a given, pre-existing problem, policymakers socially construct or set the problem. Their labeling and definition of the problem drives the policy process. Although most policy analysis focuses on the difficulties of implementation, most difficulties with policy stem from this original problem-setting process (McHoul, 1986; Schon, 1979). Rather than taking this process for granted, critical policy analysts "suspend the assumptions" of the policymakers (Edelman, 1977). They deliberately focus on problem definitions, "to discover the cracks and prise them open" (McHoul, 1986, p. 189).

In the field of language policy, Ruiz (1984) holds that discourse is indicative of the policymaker's "orientation." An orientation is a "complex of dispositions" toward the issue in question (p. 16). Ruiz identifies 3 competing orientations in policies governing language programs: the "problem," "rights," and "resource" orientations. Each one generates specific ways of labeling language minority students and defining their relationship to the institution of education. For example, labeling students limited English proficient defines them as having a problem or deficit that must be remediated. This orientation is predominant in U.S. language policy. In contrast, students may be considered to have a right to be instructed in their first language, the position of advocacy groups such as NABE. The third alternative would be to define students as speakers of other languages, as having a valuable skill that is a resource for their own learning and for society in general. This analysis can be extended to policies involving any "different" group of students. Description and prescription are inevitably linked; particular labels for students encourage some practices and repress others (McHoul, 1986).

While reformers may use a reform "buzzword" very loosely for political effect, if a term such is to be used for classifying students and funding targeted programs, policymakers will usually strive for a sharper focus on the "target." Especially in times of budgetary constraint and fiscal conservatism, new programs entailing broad entitlements for large numbers of students are unlikely to win approval. Moreover, the writing of law or administrative regulations requires that terminology and meanings be standardized (Placier, 1993).

Once a new label has been adopted into policy, defined, and tied to targeted funding, it becomes an aspect of communication between external funding sources and local educational practitioners. Districts must label and count the numbers of

students in certain categories (e.g., learning disabled) to receive categorical funding for special student services (Mehan et al., 1986). Laws or administrative regulations, not local educators, determine which label designates qualified recipients. Educators may prefer not to label students with these terms (e.g., objections to limited English proficient or LEP), but they must use them in communications with the bureaucracy.

Critique

Cultural boundaries based on race, class, gender and physical differences are dangerous linguistic domains. A speaker or writer's choice of terms in these domains will be more closely scrutinized for hidden intentions and implied meanings. Is the choice an indication of intentional or unintentional racism, sexism, classism, ablism? Ignorance of changing social norms? Current complaints about "political correctness" reflect the resistance of some groups to the social censure that comes with persisting to use terms considered offensive by others. While there are definite difficulties with legislating speech habits, critique does cause speakers to monitor and change their language over time.

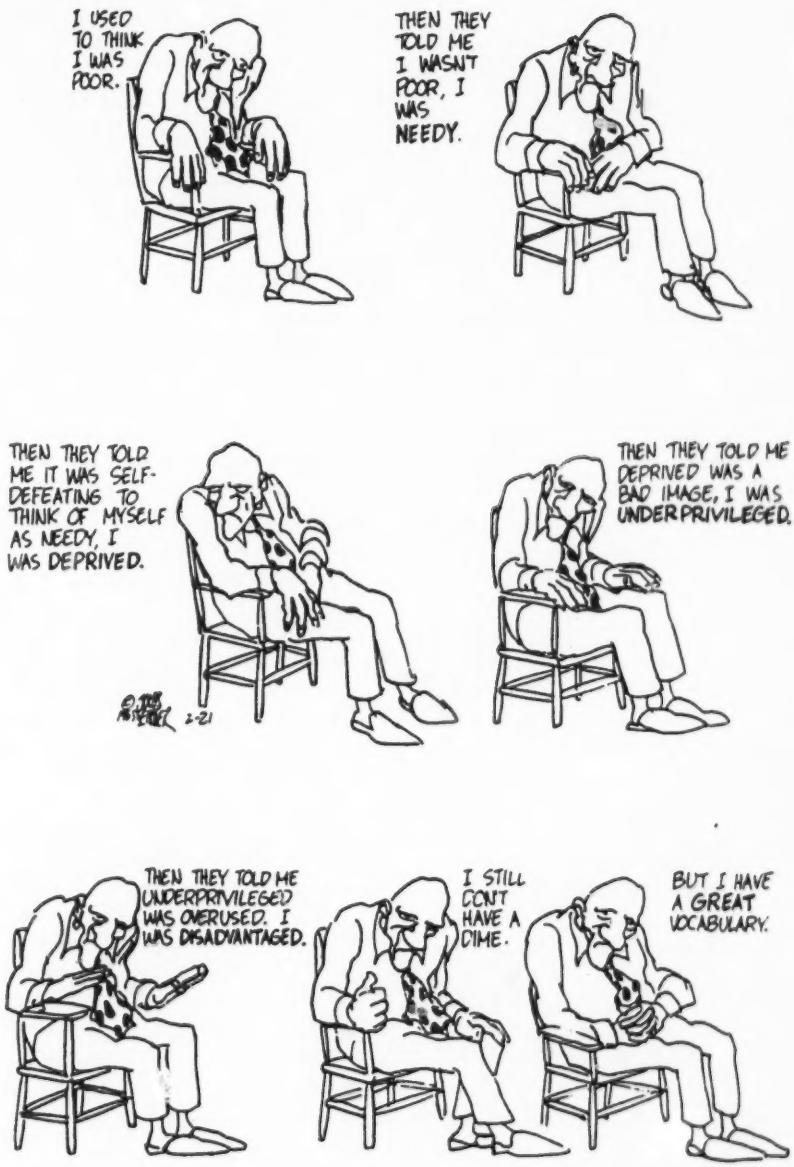
The demise of a label, however, does not mean the demise of its meanings. It does not mean the demise of the relationships between groups, the labelers and labelees, that were embedded in those meanings. The "domino theory" predicts that someone will propose a replacement that neutralizes the negative connotations of the discarded term and reflects the changing political and cultural context.

THE CASE OF 'CULTURALLY DEPRIVED/DISADVANTAGED'

The 1965 Jules Feiffer cartoon shown in Figure 1 (1965; reprinted as a frontispiece in Passow, Goldberg and Tannenbaum, 1967) reflects an awareness of the "domino theory of euphemism replacement" in the domain of descriptors of the poor. That is, although the literature of the time gave an impression of the "discovery" of a crisis, it did not require a deep reading to see that this was not the case (e.g., Wayland, 1963). However, culturally deprived/disadvantaged did label a somewhat updated interpretation of the problem, based on the concept of "culture."

Figure 2 shows the distribution of titles of educational journal articles including the terms culturally deprived/ disadvantaged for the period 1961-1982. In 1961-1964, articles titled with culturally deprived outnumbered those with culturally disadvantaged, but then the pattern reversed. Friedman (1967) speculates that criticisms of culturally deprived (Clark, 1965; Mackler & Giddings, 1965) led to its replacement among academics -- although culturally disadvantaged was essentially synonymous and seemed just as "derogatory." The terms peaked in 1967 and

Figure 1


I USED TO THINK I WAS POOR.
THEN THEY TOLD ME I WASN'T POOR, I WAS NEEDY.
THEN THEY TOLD ME IT WAS SELF-DEFEATING TO THINK OF MYSELF AS NEEDY, I WAS DEPRIVED.
THEN THEY TOLD ME DEPRIVED WAS A BAD IMAGE, I WAS UNDERPRIVILEGED.
THEN THEY TOLD ME UNDERPRIVILEGED WAS OVERUSED. I WAS DISADVANTAGED.
I STILL DON'T HAVE A DIME.
BUT I HAVE A GREAT VOCABULARY.

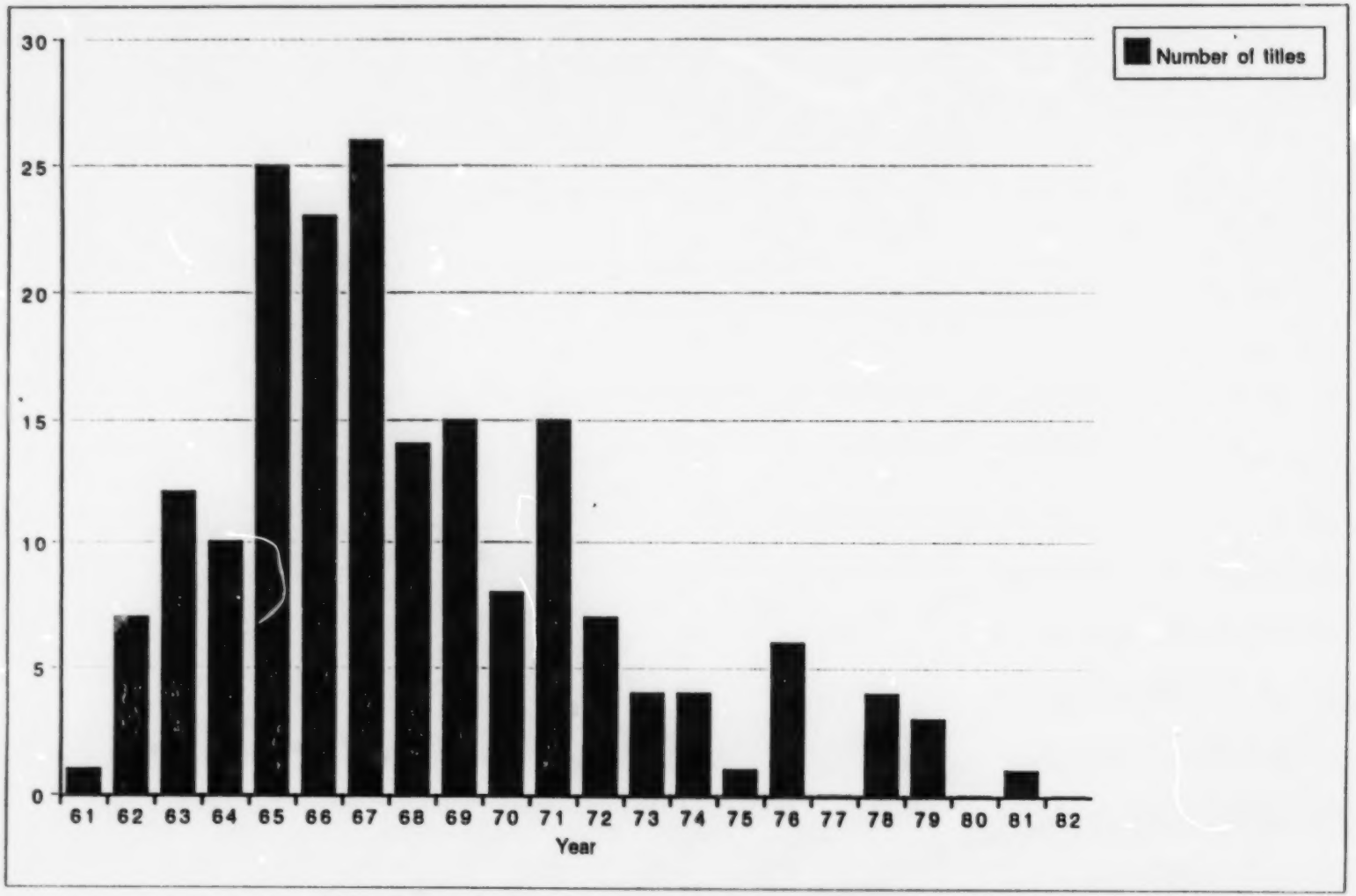


Figure 2 : Use of the terms culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived as descriptors of K-12 students in titles appearing in Education Index and CIJE (ERIC), 1961-82.

were virtually extinguished by 1982. ERIC lexicographers added culturally disadvantaged to the descriptor list in 1966 and discarded it in 1980 (Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors, 1987).

I may never discover the original sources of these terms, but they do predate the War on Poverty of the 1960s. Concerns about the relationships among race, culture, class and education arose in the wake of massive Black and Appalachian migration to cities after World War II (Ravitch, 1983; Silver & Silver, 1991). Silver and Silver (1991) cite the Ford Foundation as pivotal in funding local education programs for students in economically depressed areas beginning in the 50s. A 1960 report from a Ford Foundation-funded Great Cities pilot project in Detroit used culturally deprived, which the authors said was preferable to the older term slum children. However, "the project realized that the new vocabularies were also euphemisms and still ran the risk of becoming labels" (Silver & Silver, 1991, p. 41). Philadelphia's Great Cities report used the term culturally different; and in a funding proposal from St. Louis, this term had been substituted by hand throughout for culturally deprived, reflecting an early awareness that the difference in labels mattered (p. 42).

Friedman (1967) attributes introduction of cultural deprivation to Judith Krugman, a psychologist for the New York City Board of Education, in a 1955 presidential address to the School Psychology division of the American Psychological Association. The address was published in 1956 in High Points, the school board's journal. Another New York City school psychologist (Wrightstone, 1958) published nationally under this label in Teachers College Record two years later, using the term in "an almost self-evident fashion" (Friedman, 1967, p. 6). The first indexed article I found with culturally deprived in the title was New York City Associate Superintendent Morris Krugman's (1961) description of the Higher Horizons project, the model compensatory education program initiated in 1956 as the Demonstration Guidance Project. As early as 1963, Friedman (1967) found that in interviews New York City teachers described some students as culturally deprived without his prompting, showing diffusion from top to bottom of this school system.

Interestingly, these uses in Great Cities projects and New York City schools appeared long before publication of "culture of poverty" books by Oscar Lewis (1961) and Michael Harrington (1962), who are sometimes credited (blamed) by historians for first linking poverty and culture (e.g., Katz, 1993; Silver & Silver, 1991). Perhaps prominent authors receive too much credit as change agents? An interesting question.

The author most often credited with popularizing culturally deprived nationally is Frank Reissman (The Culturally Deprived Child, 1962). Ornstein (1971) described Reissman as a

"relatively unknown psychologist from Bard College" and his book as a "sleeper' that took off unexpectedly. Ironically, Reissman was critical of the term:

> A word is necessary about the term "culturally deprived." While lower socio-economic groups may lack many of the advantages (and disadvantages) of middle-class culture, we do not think it is appropriate to describe them as "culturally deprived"... However, since the term is in current usage, we will use "culturally deprived" interchangeably with "educationally deprived" to refer to the members of lower socio-economic groups who have had limited access to education (1962, p. 3).

He was also critical of the policy effects of this concept: compensatory education programs (specifically, New York's Higher Horizons project) focused exclusively on weaknesses rather than strengths of poor people. Friedman (1967) argues that speakers adopted Reissman's terminology more readily than his "romantic" analysis of poverty (of which Ravitch, 1983, is very critical).

But the term had political advantages: it avoided direct reference to the dangerous issues of social class and race, even though in context it quite obviously referred to poor, and most often Black, children. As Silver & Silver (1991) point out, the concept of cultural deprivation was also "welcomed as a replacement for biological theories of racial inferiority" (p. 125; see also Clark & Plotkin, 1972). It entailed more interventionist policy approaches; while biology was immutable, culture was learned and could presumably be unlearned. In 1964, Taba argued that previous labels such as problem children or underprivileged were less useful than culturally deprived. The former terms only described problems; the latter pointed toward their "possible causes" (Silver & Silver, 1991, p. 68). Enthusiasm for programs that would address the cultural causes of school failure grew rapidly. More than 100 communities created compensatory education programs from 1960-65 (Ravitch, 1983).

Culturally deprived was added to the 1961-63 edition of the Education Index. In 1964, a Research Conference on Education and Cultural Deprivation at the University of Chicago resulted in another popular book (Bloom, Davis & Hess, 1965) that portrayed a growing consensus among psychological experts and educationists, and further diffused culturally deprived (Friedman, 1967; Ravitch, 1983). Friedman (1967) and Ornstein (1971) observed transmission of this concept from researchers to practitioners through media such as the NEA Journal and other practitioner-oriented journals. In 1965, use among educational researchers was reinforced through a special issue of the Review of Educational Research. ERIC established a clearinghouse under this title. Ornstein did not hear anything original in the

flurry of publications that "repeated the same 'wisdom' and tired statements about what was wrong, coupled with suggested solutions based on hunches, sentiment and unverified or subjective data" (1971, p. 18). Some "experts" published essentially the same information in numerous publications. In most publications, culturally deprived/disadvantaged were used uncritically, and the compensatory education model was taken for granted. Additional means of diffusion were inservice workshops, professional meetings, and college of education courses. Later, when the term was falling from favor, Gordon (in Clark et al., 1972) blamed textbook companies for "packaging cultural deprivation...to the point where it encourages stupidity" (p. 77).

Other means of diffusion are suggested by a review of the sponsorship of reports indexed by ERIC for the years 1962-73. Of 124 reports with culturally deprived/disadvantaged in the titles, 61 originated at universities, primarily large research universities, both public and private. Another 31 were papers read at academic conferences (8 AERA, 4 APA). Only 12 reports were issued by school districts, and only 4 by one state department of education (California). Of 38 reports indicating federal sponsorship, 26 were sponsored by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) Office of Education, and 7 by the Office of Economic Opportunity. While the Ford Foundation had been active early, in this period only 5 reports indicated private foundation sponsorship. The ERIC reports portray a network linking research universities with Washington, with little direct local or state initiation. The link, and the incentive for adopting the terms culturally disadvantaged/deprived, was funding for research and development.

The reason for all of this federal research funding, of course, was the change in federal policy priorities during the War on Poverty period. While this is often interpreted as a liberal movement, Friedman (1967) suggests that

> What seemed to have happened was that the idea of culturally deprived children was successful as a trigger for legislative action because it possessed an extensive and flexible image appeal to a broad spectrum of persons and publics of various ideological persuasions (p. 8).

Liberals associated culturally deprived with helping the poor, while conservatives attended to the possibility of changing them -- especially after urban riots and release of the infamous Moynihan report in the mid-1960s. When liberals thought of the "culturally deprived" they saw the "deserving poor," while conservatives saw the "undeserving poor" (Katz, 1993). This flexibility of interpretation was a strength in terms of bipartisan policymaking.

> First, with respect to the phrase cultural deprivation, perhaps the simplest thing here is to make a motion that we will never use this term again...Certainly the term should be out the window. It was a very unfortunate choice of title for Frank Reissman's book (Havighurst in Clark et al., 1972, p. 74).

Why did culturally deprived/disadvantaged dwindle and then practically disappear from use? There are several possible, interrelated explanations.

First, accusations that these terms stigmatized their referents, reinforcing stereotypes of racial and cultural inferiority, appeared in the mid-1960s (Katz, 1993; Silver & Silver, 1991):

> The term "dehumanizes" Negroes, the "defined" in relation to whites, the "definers" (Mackler & Giddings 1965, p. 610).

> Just as those who proposed the earlier racial inferiority theories were invariably members of the dominant racial groups who presumed themselves and their groups to be superior, those who at present propose the cultural deprivation theory are, in fact, members of the privileged group who inevitably associate their privileged status with their own innate intellect and its related educational success (Clark, 1965, p. 131).

Silver and Silver (1991) argue that in the U.S. the "euphemistic analysis of poverty...in many instances was taken to mean race" (p. 327). Some members of the most-labelled group, African Americans, rejected the labels outright; Ravitch (1983) cites psychologist Kenneth Clark as the most influential critic. As the quotation above illustrates, he came to see cultural deprivation as a thinly-veiled replacement for genetic inferiority theory (cf. Persell, 1981).

"This perspective was soon adopted by advocates of black community control, who asserted that black children failed because of the racism and low expectations of their teachers" (Ravitch, 1983, p. 158). The labels had provided educators with excuses for Black children's failure and reinforced a blame-the-victim ideology (Clark, 1972; Goodman, 1969; Katz, 1993; Keppel, 1966; Mackler & Giddings, 1965; Ryan, 1971; Silver & Silver, 1991). Ravitch (1983) suggests that as poverty programs moved toward a "community control" position, it also became increasingly awkward to refer to the participants as "culturally deprived." Black scholars rejected the passive image conveyed by the "cultural" terms and argued that power and racism were the real issues. This critique intensified in 1965 after the release

of the Moynihan report on the Negro family (Katz, 1993). According to Ravitch (1983), the heated response to Moynihan made it clear to social scientists that "certain issues involving race and culture were taboo, or at the very least to be approached with extreme caution" (p. 161).

As a result of this critique, by the mid-1960s there were demands to discard the terms:

> We must discard and avoid the tags, labels, misunderstandings, and myths which have blocked the paths to progress...We must purge ourselves of the concept of 'cultural deprivation' and all its derogatory implications. If a concept is needed, then we must seek a more accurate, authentic and honest term. If we conclude that no term is needed, perhaps that will be all the better (Mackler & Giddings, 1965, p. 609, 612).

A number of replacements for culturally deprived/ disadvantaged were proposed (Silver & Silver, 1991), e.g. the cover of Clark et al. (1972) shows the term culturally deprived, with an X through culturally, substituting the term educationally.

Second, there were complaints that the terms were ill-defined. Muddy definitions and weak conceptualizations were leading to weak social science research and confused policymaking (Clark, 1972; Clark & Plotkin, 1972; Das, 1970; Gordon, 1965; Miller, 1967; Ravitch, 1983; Silver & Silver, 1991). Some even argued that definitions should include middle class children who were psychologically "disadvantaged" (Fantini & Weinstein, 1968). But Das (1970) contended that

> the term cultural deprivation is used more as a euphemism than as a useful term whose meaning is apparent...We should begin with a structurally defined group and area. The situation is similar to that of a medical team which is trying to fight an epidemic (p. 150-1).

This quotation supports the argument that when a term initially used to generate reform is taken up by researchers and policymakers, its meanings must be specified in order to "target" research subjects and program recipients. Poverty as a "culture" was difficult to operationalize (Levine, 1970). In practice, as a qualification for inclusion in compensatory programs, income was the primary criterion. Economic definitions presented enough difficulties (where is the "poverty" line?), without having to factor in psychological and behavioral attributes to identify program recipients (Levine, 1970).

Third, and clearly related to the above critiques, social science theory was moving toward a relativistic "cultural

difference" position that placed responsibility for low achievement on the backs of educators (Silver & Silver, 1991). Culturally deprived/disadvantaged fit with anthropological theories of cultural evolution dating to the 19th century (e.g., Lewis Henry Morgan). According to these theories, certain cultural groups had not yet reached the highest stage of civilization. Radically opposed to the evolutionists were cultural relativists such as Franz Boas, who posited that cultures could best be understood on their own terms, without unfavorable comparisons to dominant cultures.

Baratz and Baratz (1970) held that social scientists should "attack" all research emerging from the deficit perspective. Lower achievement was caused by differences between home and school cultures, and a devaluing or subordinating of the home culture by educators (Collins, 1988; Persell, 1981). Answers would lie in valuing and incorporating elements of home cultures in school programs. This position had actually been present throughout the "cultural deficit" period, as an alternative analysis (Reissman, 1962). But the "difference" analysis was a mismatch with "deficit" terminology, and as a consequence did not seem to be heard until the "deficit" terms were rejected.

Finally, the shift in political winds in the 1970s and 1980s meant that liberal policy solutions, and the language associated with them, became passe (Katz, 1993; Ravitch, 1983). A new wave of politicians and policymakers attacked the effectiveness and ideological basis of War on Poverty programs. Neo-conservative historian Ravitch (1983) dismissed them as based on misguided and "crude social analysis" (and further dismissed cultural difference theory as an "ersatz form of egalitarianism," p. 157). Katz (1993) argues that as a result of attacks from both left and right the "culture of poverty" went into a "deep, if temporary eclipse" as a focus of policymaking -- to re-emerge in the 1980s as the "underclass" (p. 13).

For all of the above reasons, "cultural" descriptors of low-achieving students went out of favor. Disadvantaged, however, lived on, and so did the deficit model (Katz, 1993; Silver & Silver, 1991). Kinsler (1990) found that the cultural deficit model still permeated teacher education textbooks of the 1980s, even in the absence of the terms culturally deprived/ disadvantaged. Few authors showed a shift to the cultural difference position.

THE CASE OF 'AT RISK'

> Formerly labelled "educationally disadvantaged," "culturally deprived," or something similarly pejorative, these youngsters have been referred to since 1983 as "at risk students" (Crosby, 1993, p. 599).

Figure 3 shows the distribution of ERIC-indexed titles of journal articles including the term at-risk as a descriptor of K-12 students for 1971-1992 (1993 has not yet been fully indexed). One obvious clue that at-risk might be a replacement for culturally deprived/disadvantaged was the fact that when at-risk emerged as a buzzword of the 1980s, the Education Index automatically listed at-risk titles under the descriptor culturally deprived, which the editors (unlike those at ERIC) had not discarded.

I first became interested in at-risk in 1986 when, as an ethnographer on a research project that became the book School Children At-Risk (Richardson, Casanova, Placier & Guilfoyle, 1989), I noticed that classroom teachers were initially unfamiliar with (and sometimes resistant to) the term:

> The point is, I don't see all of a sudden how that's the buzzword. All these kids are at-risk and I don't see it's making any difference whether we're labeling them at-risk or not (Elementary teacher, 1986 pilot interview for Richardson et al., 1989).

At-risk was obviously being introduced to schools from the outside; in fact, as researchers, we were agents of linguistic change, diffusing the term from the national to the local level. The project was funded by the Exxon Foundation, one of a number of studies of at-risk students at several research universities around the country.

Analysis of a systematic sample of the at-risk student literature shows that at risk did not label a new category of students, but a collection of categories that had been considered problematic for many years, e.g., low-income children, minorities, dropouts, drug/alcohol abusers, teen mothers, etc. As Best (1990) argues, there is a tendency among social reformers to expand the number of categories included under a general, umbrella term. But most reform reports focused on poor and minority children as the major constituents of the at-risk category. That is, culturally deprived/disadvantaged and at-risk labelled essentially the same groups.

A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE] 1983) popularized at-risk, as a medical and military analogy for a nation under siege from external and internal economic threats. Near the conclusion, the authors also referred to certain students as at-risk:

> The Federal Government, in cooperation with States and localities, should help meet the needs of key groups of students such as the gifted and talented, the socio-economically disadvantaged, minority and language minority students, and the handicapped. In combination, these groups

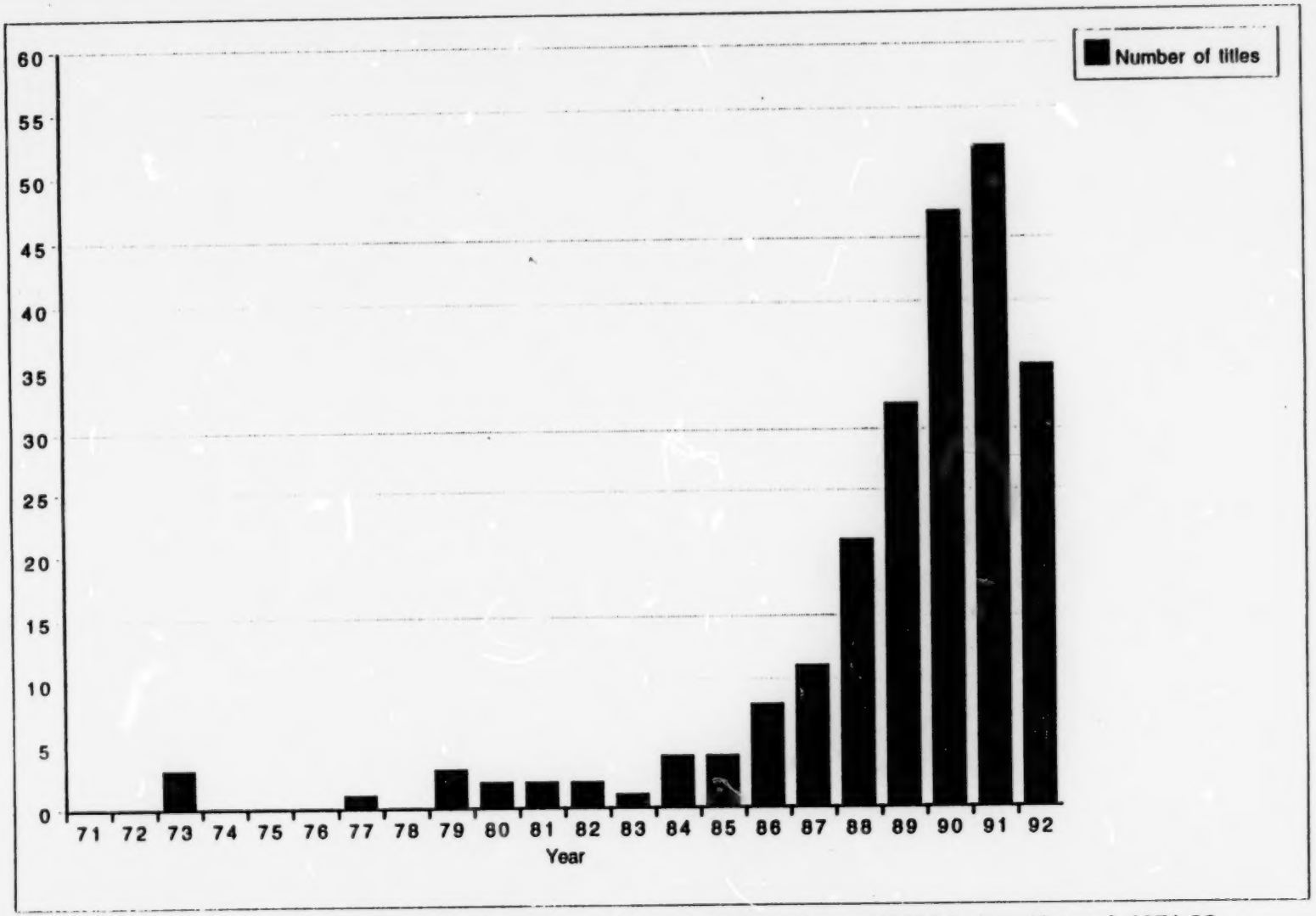


Figure 3: Use of the term <u>at risk</u> as descriptor of K-12 students in titles of ERIC-indexed journal, 1971-92.

include both national resources and the Nation's youth who are most at risk (ibid., 32).

If one assumes, given the themes of the report, that by "national resources" the authors meant the gifted and talented, that left the remaining groups labeled at-risk. These were students for whom the federal government had taken more responsibility during the 1960-70s. In the 1980s, they were seen as placing the Nation (everyone else, especially employers) at risk, because of their academic difficulties and cultural diversity. The authors granted that equity for such students should not be abandoned, but special accommodations should not be overdone; excellence must be the national priority.

In 1985 a liberal rejoinder from the National Coalition of Advocates for Students [NCAS], Barriers to Excellence: Our Children at Risk, employed at-risk as a rhetorical device to refute the argument that educators' attention to equity had weakened their commitment to excellence. Rather, the Reaganites' weakened commitment to equity placed certain children -- Blacks, the poor, females, cultural and linguistic minorities, and the handicapped -- at risk. With the exception of females, then, the two reports labeled the same groups at-risk. In A Nation at Risk, they were at-risk because of their own characteristics; but in the Barriers report, they were at-risk because of conservative policy decisions. NCAS argued against labeling children at-risk because of possible stigmatization (cf. early users of culturally deprived). Despite these intentions, the report was credited with "making the term 'at risk students' part of the reform lexicon" (Hill, 1989, p. 53).

Kenneth Clark was chair of a six-member panel that advised the authors of another report, America's Shame, America's Hope: Twelve Million Youth at Risk (MDC, 1988), sponsored by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Clark's Foreword set the report in a decidedly critical direction, with a strong note of anger and accusation. He referred to at-risk youth as coming "disproportionately" from "socially, racially, and economically disadvantaged groups" in our society, because they were the "unavoidable victims of the larger pattern of social, racial, and educational discrimination" (p. ii). He discussed how educational "rationalizations" for the low achievement of certain students had changed over time, accompanied by a pattern of changing labels. First there was genetic inferiority, then cultural deprivation, and now "different learning styles" (p. iii). Interestingly, he did not include at-risk in this litany of negative labels. He charged that youth at risk are subjected to "psychological genocide" and "consigned toward America's form of concentration camps without walls" (p. iii). The body of report, in comparison with Clark's Foreword, was considerably less critical. It proposed that with the support of more federal funding, the "equity" and "excellence" agendas could be merged to

serve the best interests of youth and "the nation."

Margonis (1992) convincingly argues that the NCAS critique was co-opted by conservatives and absorbed into the "excellence" agenda. "The critics erred in overestimating their own ability to influence policy in the national arena through the force of argument alone" (p. 358). The equity position simply had no political life of its own; the rhetoric associated with it was "out" (Clark & Astuto, 1986). Thereafter, with both conservative and liberal support, at risk became the new label for poor and minority students (cf. Friedman's similar argument about culturally deprived).

Where did reformers find at risk, and what meanings did it carry? Risk, the possibility of harm or loss, is an important notion in business and public administration, law, insurance and medicine. There are similarities across these fields in ways of thinking about and coping with risk. The analysis and management of risk, and protection against risk, are institutionalized, professionalized and marketed. Experts are assigned to predict and, as much as possible, control risk through the application of probabilistic models involving large numbers.

However, risk theorists argue that beneath the surface, decisions about risk are fraught with emotion, ambiguity and conflict.

> Judgments about risk are a social comment. The concepts of accountability, responsibility, and liability that pervade debates about risk are in effect political statements expressing points of tension and value conflict in a society (Nelkin, 1985, p. 16).

Cultural orientations toward risk vary widely in a diverse society, creating differences of opinion about how risks should be managed (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982). The risk expert's task is to make decisions about risk appear rational and manageable.

The specific form, at-risk, is a feature of the discourse of the medical subfield of epidemiology. Epidemiologists determine statistical associations among the incidence of diseases or other dangerous conditions and characteristics of persons suffering from those conditions. Through a sequential reasoning process they identify the populations most at risk, thus allowing public health officials to efficiently target interventions. To prevent an increase in the incidence of a condition, they may also target interventions toward those not at risk, to advise them how to avoid risk (e.g., "safe sex") (Lilienfield and Lilienfield, 1980; Dever, 1984). The insurance industry uses epidemiological findings to set premiums based on the relative risk of insuring some persons compared with others.

Before A Nation at Risk and Barriers to Excellence proposed the term as a new label for students previously labeled culturally deprived/disadvantaged, at risk was already in use in education, but almost exclusively among researchers in special education and educational psychology (Placier, 1991). From their usage and practices, these specialists seemed to have borrowed the term from medicine. They often used epidemiological methods to target children for inclusion in early intervention programs. This epidemiological model was carried along with at risk when it was adopted as a replacement for culturally deprived/disadvantaged.

While it can be argued that at risk replaced culturally deprived/disadvantaged, the terms are not exactly synomyous. There were differences in meaning that illustrated differences in the problem-setting process in the two reform eras (Schon, 1979). According to social science theories of the day, culturally deprived/disadvantaged denoted an entire syndrome, a culture of poverty caused by disintegration of the family and a sense of defeatism (Harrington, 1962; Spring, 1989). The War on Poverty was, Spring (1989) contends, a war on this culture. Its goal was to target members of the culture with programs designed to organize them into "communities" (Schon, 1979).

In the at-risk era there was a relative absence of the community ideology. The at-risk population, according to the epidemiological model, does not share any common group identity or culture. Rather, they are individuals identified as statistically more likely to fall victim to a condition or to exhibit a behavior (e.g., dropping out). The at-risk are not organized into communities, but identified one by one and then channeled into groups for treatment. The at-risk population just "happens" to include more poor, minority students, because of the correlation between income, ethnicity and school failure. The one psychological trait they are often said to hold in common is "low self-esteem." Rather than lacking a strong culture or community, they lack a strong sense of themselves as individuals, which their treatment is designed to provide.

A widely-cited expert on at-risk students, Slavin (1989), attempted to sort out the differences in the meanings of disadvantaged and at-risk. He reasoned that

> . . . disadvantaged evokes a concern for students who are poor, a socioeconomic definition. Use of this term leads us to programs focusing on populations with given characteristics, such as Head Start and (in original conception) Title I/Chapter 1. It takes the philosophical position that the children of the poor have much to overcome to achieve success in the educational system, and deserve additional resources and special programs to enable them to do so (p. 2).

In contrast, Slavin says, use of the term at-risk

> . . . evokes a concern for individual children who are already achieving below grade level expectations or are likely (based on any of several risk factors) to fall behind. With its focus on the individual, the term at risk leads us toward special education or toward Chapter 1 programs targeted to the lowest achieving students. It allows us to be concerned about non-disadvantaged students who are experiencing difficulties in school (p. 3).

According to Slavin's distinctions, disadvantaged is the term for members of a stigmatized group, the poor, who have problems in school and need special treatment as a group; while at risk is the term for individuals of any social class who have problems in school and need individual intervention. The differences in meanings lead to different policy responses. Slavin also argues that at an early age, group identities rather than individual characteristics may be more accurate predictors of failure. Therefore, group-targeted prevention programs for all disadvantaged students are a better choice for elementary schools, while programs for individually-identified at-risk students are more efficacious in secondary schools. But if in some districts almost all individually-identified at-risk students are poor and minority students, Slavin's distinction is not a strong one in practice (Fine, 1988).

At risk was a student label especially suited to the political climate of the 1980s, since it was neutral with regard to class, race and culture, seemingly apolitical. It was applied based on individual characteristics rather than group identity, and therefore was not associated with collective equity or civil rights strategies. It was associated with what are considered more objective means of identification, through the epidemiological model. It exemplified what Bolinger and Sears (1981) called "denatured" discourse. Culturally deprived/ disadvantaged in comparison seem obviously loaded with negative connotations. Margonis (1992) notes that "this apparent neutrality is the concept's greatest ideological strength: a deficit conception with egalitarian pretensions" (p. 346).

At-risk quickly diffused beyond the boundaries of the specialized fields in which it appeared before 1983. After A Nation at Risk, the number of ERIC-cited titles including the term at risk dramatically increased. Moreover, there was a change in the kind of publication in which the term appeared. From 1966-1983, most at-risk titles were accounted for by journals concentrating on medical, psychological and special education research. After 1983, at-risk titles moved into

journals aimed at regular educational practitioners, not researchers or specialists. At-risk is used, for the most part, uncritically by these authors, and the epidemiological model (early intervention to prevent failure or dropping out) is taken for granted (Placier, 1991).

At risk as a student label also diffused through a series of reform reports from virtually every national education organization. Education Week articles and advertisements showed that conferences planners, funding agencies, and book and test publishers were adopting at- risk as a theme. "At risk students" appeared and grew as a category of AERA presentations. There was an indication that some researchers who had formerly identified their work with the term disadvantaged had now adopted at risk. Incentives for linguistic change included private and public sector funding for research on at-risk students.

Again, there were parallels with the War on Poverty era, in which research on the identification and treatment of culturally disadvantaged students produced a new group of experts and a new body of expert knowledge on solutions to the problems of these children. This process would escalate as state and local policies for at-risk students were formulated and implemented, and the demand for expertise grew (Placier, 1993). There seemed to be an assumption behind all of this activity that at-risk designated a new problem, that the huge body of research on culturally deprived/disadvantaged students was no longer of use. However, our own study (Richardson et al., 1989) in all honesty generated very little new knowledge about schooling -- what was novel was our use of the term at-risk.

WILL CRITIQUE ELIMINATE 'AT RISK'?

Paralleling this burst of activity, a number of authors have for several years critiqued the use of at risk as a quasi-neutral label for poor and minority students. For example, Jonathan Kozol delivered these remarks at a Forum on Youth at Risk sponsored in 1987 by the Education Commission of the States:

> The title of this conference, though apt, is a trifle antiseptic. Youth at risk is a sanitized term. It doesn't carry much effect, much emotion. Devastated children would be closer to the truth in many cases. Youth at risk implies a possible danger in the future. But we don't live in the future. And it is the present sorrows we need to face (Kozol, in ECS, pp. 22-23).

However, Kozol's perspective was not included in the "consensus" recommendations at the end of the report.

Fine (1988) argued that "the term 'students at risk' smells of kitsch" (p. 16). By "kitsch," she meant that the term allowed

educators to exclude ways of looking at students that would threaten their positive image, allowed them to avoid uncomfortable self-criticism. Her study of dropouts in one urban high school showed that despite the school's positive public image, the majority of students, not a small targetable minority, were "at risk."

Within historical frameworks, Cuban (1989) and Swadener (1990) argue that at-risk is merely the latest label for perennial, unsolved dilemmas of American society and schooling. They review the repeated labeling and discriminatory treatment of poor and minority students, emphasizing continuities in attitudes and practices that have prevented fundamental change. Replacing labels, they argue, keeps us from seeing the essential elements of the problem: negative, judgmental relationships between school and home in some communities, and the transformation of difference into deviance.

Multicultural education theorists Sleeter and Grant (1993) and James Banks also argue that at-risk is quite simply a replacement for culturally deprived/disadvantaged, and as such should be subjected to the same critique that was leveled in the 1960s. Just as in 1960s, there are proposals to discard at risk as a "pejorative euphemism" for minority students (Tillman, 1991). Swadener (1990) asks,

> What if traditionally oppressed groups, who are the global majority and are soon to be the majority in the U.S., defined, boycotted, and eventually declared a moratorium on 'at risk,' as a bankrupt construct which perpetuates a deficit model? (p. 35).

Margonis (1992) similarly equates at-risk and culturally deprived/disadvantaged, but argues that because of its apparent neutrality at-risk is much more "elusive" and immune from critique. At-risk is also supported by now by a large body of statistical research confusing correlation with causation, "proving" that certain student characteristics are the "causes" of school failure. Critics may not have the political clout, in the current context, to turn this analysis around. Yet according to Figure 3, at-risk may have peaked. It may go the way of culturally deprived/disadvantaged, if not because of its critics, perhaps because it becomes a worn cliche that no longer excites much interest. Moreover, the state and local funding that has supported limited at-risk programs is unstable, given competing priorities such as health care and crime.

In summary, this case study seems to lend support to a theoretical framework for understanding cases of lexical replacement in the domain of terms for stigmatized groups of students. However, close analysis of specific cases also reveals complexities. One label does not simply replace the previous

one. Rather, the new label reflects something new about the political context, the current ways of interpreting differences and mediating cultural boundaries. Katz (1993) makes this argument for the term underclass, that it is something more than a replacement for the culture of poverty, that it does describe a qualitatively different situation in many low-income communities. What is constant, he argues, is the "perception that the poor are different from the rest of us" (p. 466). Labels mark us/them boundaries that are perceived by "us" -- the culturally undeprived, the not-at-risk -- as fundamental and threatening differences. And that is the problem (Placier, 1992).

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